

# Voters Win with Election Day Registration

## WHAT IS ELECTION DAY REGISTRATION?

Election Day Registration (EDR), sometimes called “Same Day Registration” (SDR), allows eligible voters to register and cast a ballot on Election Day. Nine states currently have Same Day Registration. Maine, Minnesota and Wisconsin adopted EDR in the 1970s; Idaho, New Hampshire and Wyoming enacted Election Day Registration two decades later. More recently, Montana implemented EDR in 2006, while Iowa and North Carolina enacted Same Day Registration in 2007. Iowa allows registration and voting on Election Day. North Carolina permits registration and voting during the state’s extended early voting period.

## Voter Turnout in the 2008 Presidential Election

### Average for EDR States

(Idaho, Iowa, Maine, Minn., Mont., N.H., N.C., Wis., Wyo.)

**69%**

### Average for Non-EDR States

**62%**

**Source:** United States Election Project, [http://elections.gmu.edu/voter\\_turnout.htm](http://elections.gmu.edu/voter_turnout.htm) (calculating presidential ballots cast by voting-eligible population)

*\*North Dakota, which does not require voter registration, was excluded from these calculations.*

By counteracting arbitrary voter registration deadlines, EDR greatly enhances the opportunity for Americans to participate in the electoral process and cast a ballot that will be properly counted. States with EDR have historically boasted turnout rates 10 to 12 percentage points higher than states that do not offer Election Day Registration.

## STATE BY STATE SUMMARY 2008

### Idaho

Idaho recorded 116,242 individuals registering to vote on Election Day in November 2008, representing over 17 percent of the total ballots cast in the election.<sup>1</sup>

### Iowa

Election Day Registration went into effect in Iowa in January 2008. Almost 46,000 Iowans used EDR to vote in the November election.<sup>2</sup>

### Maine

Turnout among eligible voters topped 71 percent of Maine's presidential vote in 2008—significantly higher than the 62 percent average for non-EDR states.<sup>3</sup>

### Minnesota

541,876 people registered using EDR in Minnesota in the November 2008 election. Their ballots accounted for more than 18 percent of the votes cast in that election.<sup>4</sup>

### Montana

In the 2008 general election, 18,357 Montana citizens registered and voted during the state's "late registration" period, which runs from the close of the regular registration period up to and including Election Day. Of those, 7,419 registered on Election Day itself.<sup>5</sup>

### New Hampshire

76,755 New Hampshire residents registered and voted on Election Day in November 2008. Of the 719,403 ballots cast in the state, 10.7 percent were from individuals registering on Election Day.<sup>6</sup>

### North Carolina

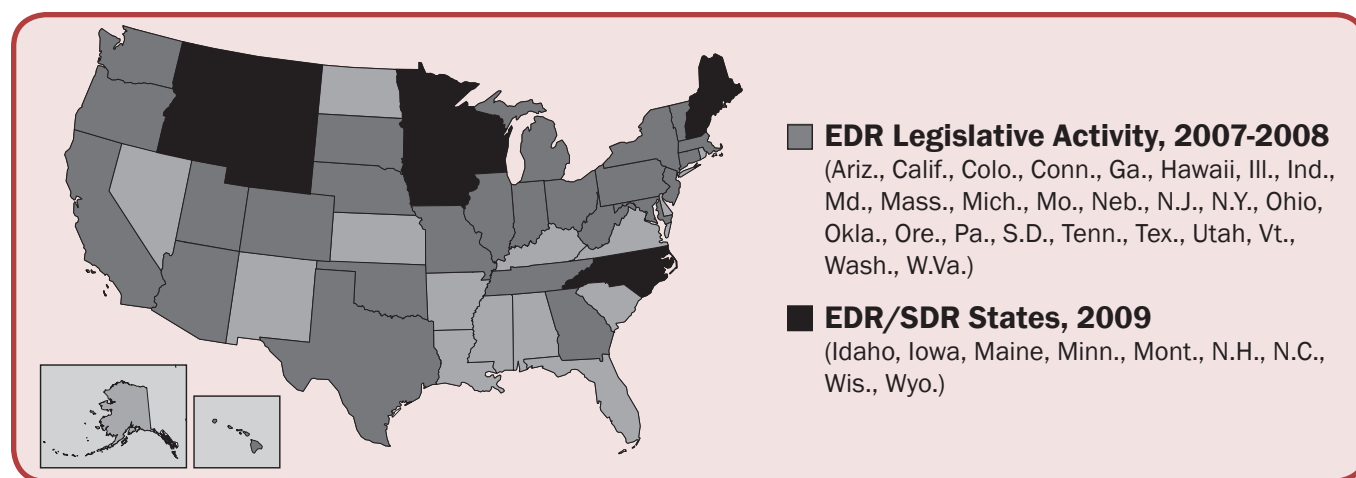
Same Day Registration went into effect in North Carolina in October 2007. The state subsequently saw a steep rise in voter turnout in the November 2008 presidential election. Voting rose 8 percentage points over the 2004 vote, the greatest presidential vote increase in the nation.<sup>7</sup> 253,000 individuals used SDR in the run-up to the November 4, 2008 election. 105,000 were first-time voters in their counties; the balance used SDR to update their voter registration records and avoid the need to vote by provisional ballot.<sup>8</sup>

### Wisconsin

Wisconsin reported 436,347 registrations on Election Day in 2008. This figure accounts for over 14 percent of the total turnout for the state.<sup>9</sup>

### Wyoming

As of publication, final statistics for EDR usage in November 2008 were not yet finalized. Data was unavailable for two counties (Hot Springs and Sheridan). Wyoming's 23 other counties preliminarily report a total of 37,692 new voters who used EDR in the 2008 general election.<sup>10</sup>



## NATIONAL SUMMARY

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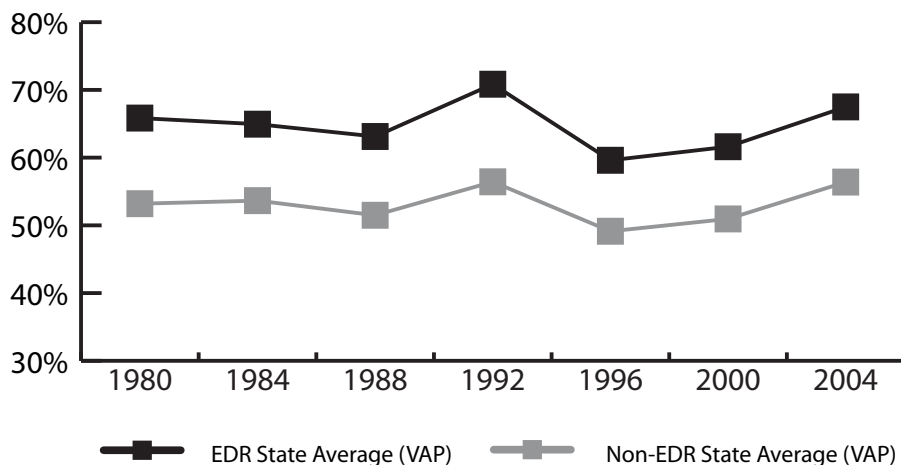
### EDR in the 2008 Election

The 2008 presidential election was marked by a tremendous surge in voter interest and participation. While final data on EDR usage in the 2008 presidential election is not yet available, preliminary figures show that **over 1 million Americans used EDR to vote on or before November 4, 2008**. They represented as high as 18 percent of citizens (Minnesota) in those states who participated in the 2008 general election.

### Preliminary 2008 EDR Overview

- » More than 1 million individuals used EDR to register and vote in the 2008 general election. This bloc of voters is larger than the populations of Detroit, Michigan; Jacksonville, Florida; Indianapolis, Indiana; and San Francisco, California. In fact, this number is larger than the entire populations of both Rhode Island and Delaware.
- » Voter turnout in the nine states that allowed people to register and vote on the same day in the 2008 election was, on average, over seven percentage points higher than states without EDR.<sup>11</sup>
- » The top five voter turnout states were all EDR states (Minnesota, Wisconsin, Maine, New Hampshire and Iowa).

### Turnout Rates in EDR vs. Non-EDR States from 1980 to 2004, Presidential Election Years



**Source:** United States Election Project, [http://elections.gmu.edu/voter\\_turnout.htm](http://elections.gmu.edu/voter_turnout.htm), using Voting Age Population

## EDR BENEFITS VOTERS AND STATE ELECTION ADMINISTRATORS

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### **EDR allows eligible voters who may have been mistakenly purged from the voting rolls to cast a meaningful ballot.**

The Help America Vote Act of 2002 required states to offer provisional ballots at the polls to voters whose names did not appear on the voter rolls. These provisional ballots will only be counted if election officials subsequently determine that the individuals were eligible to vote.<sup>12</sup>

More than one in three of the almost 2 million provisional ballots cast in 2004 were ultimately discounted.<sup>13</sup> Over 20 percent of provisional ballots cast in the 2006 midterm election were rejected.<sup>14</sup> Much like patients sent home with a placebo, many provisional voters mistakenly believed that they were given a genuine opportunity to vote. EDR allows voters who have been purged or mistakenly left off the rolls to re-register and cast a ballot that will be counted.

### **EDR states consistently boast higher turnout than non-EDR states.**

States with Election Day Registration have boasted higher voter turnout than those without EDR for over 25 years. Preliminary data show an average voter turnout seven percentage points higher than the average turnout for non-EDR states in November 2008. The EDR turnout advantage reached 12 percentage points in the 2004 presidential race. While higher voting rates in Election Day Registration states may not be solely attributable to EDR, research shows that at least three to six percentage points of historical increases were directly related to EDR.

### **EDR counteracts arbitrary voter registration deadlines.**

Voter registration deadlines vary widely across the nation. The experience of EDR states show that these cut-off dates bear little relevance to a state's ability to run smooth elections. Nevertheless, 28 states close off voter registration 25 or more days before the election—well before many would-be voters have been fully apprised of candidates and campaign issues.

### **Voter registration deadlines close before the media and the public fully focus on elections.**

For example, the University of Wisconsin's NewsLab found that over 40 percent of election news stories were aired in the final week before the 2006 election in seven Midwest media markets.<sup>15</sup> A 2000 election poll found that the percentage of people giving "quite a lot" of thought to the election rose significantly as Election Day approached, from 59 percent in September to 75 percent in the first week of November.<sup>16</sup> An unregistered voter who had decided to participate in the historic 2008 presidential and congressional elections in the final week of the campaigns would have been ineligible to vote in 41 states.

**"In Minnesota, we not only believe citizenship is an American right, it is also an American responsibility. We go out of our way to make sure every single Minnesotan exercises his or her duty and is allowed to vote. For the past 34 years, Election Day Registration has guaranteed them that right—fairly and freely. It's a right that all Americans should share."**

**U.S. Rep. Keith Ellison (D-MN)**

## **EDR assists young voters.**

Young Americans move frequently—for school, for jobs, for family—making it harder for them to keep their voter registrations current. Although voter turnout among 18-29 year olds has steadily increased over the last four presidential elections, it still lagged behind the overall turnout rate.<sup>17</sup> EDR is a powerful tool that can be used to ensure that young people are able to register and vote.

Research indicates that allowing young people to register to vote on Election Day could increase youth turnout in presidential elections by as much as 14 percentage points.<sup>18</sup> Montanans between the ages of 18 and 25 comprised more than a third of the approximately 9200 individuals who registered to vote under Montana's new statute between October 7, 2006 and November 7, 2006.<sup>19</sup>

## **EDR enfranchises geographically mobile and lower-income citizens.**

Census data shows that almost 40 million people in America moved between 2005 and 2006. Approximately one-third of those moving during this period had incomes of less than \$25,000.<sup>20</sup> With voter registration deadlines, many Americans who have recently moved are unable to fulfill their duty as citizens to vote in elections. With EDR, they can re-register on Election Day and cast a ballot.

**“Nevada has consistently been near the bottom in terms of the number of registered voters and those who actually cast their ballots. There are several factors that contribute to this poor showing, but certainly the fact that in Nevada people must register to vote at least 30 days before an election serves as a stumbling block for increasing participation.”**

**U.S. Rep. and former Nevada Secretary of State  
Dean Heller (R-NV), supporting state EDR bill**

## **EDR is cost-effective and easier for elections officials to administer than provisional ballots.**

An authoritative study indicates that elections are no more expensive to administer in EDR states than elsewhere.<sup>21</sup> Most respondents to a 2007 telephone survey of local election officials in the EDR states of Idaho, Maine, Minnesota, New Hampshire, Wisconsin and Wyoming described the incremental cost of EDR as minimal.<sup>22</sup>

Non-EDR states are also far more likely to distribute large numbers of provisional ballots. According to Wisconsin's elections director, his state's ability to avoid provisional balloting “alone makes EDR worthwhile.”<sup>23</sup> After an election, officials must spend extra time and effort to comb voter registration records and determine whether a provisional voter had actually registered and whether her ballot should be counted. This process can take days or weeks. EDR spares election officials from these efforts, and ensures that voters can cast ballots that will be counted.

## EDR does not encourage voter fraud.

A bi-partisan team of consultants to the Election Assistance Commission reported widespread agreement that very little evidence existed of voter impersonation at the polls.<sup>24</sup> A recent analysis of 2002-2005 data from EDR states also found very little evidence of voter fraud.<sup>25</sup> And the great majority of local elections officials participating in a 2007 survey in Election Day Registration states rated current fraud-prevention measures sufficient to protect the integrity of elections.<sup>26</sup>

**“As an election official, I seek to facilitate the highest possible vote turnout through a secure process. Election Day Registration is a big part of our success in achieving those goals. EDR ensures that all eligible voters can cast their ballots, without jumping through unnecessary hoops. And EDR keeps voter turnout in our state very high. It’s good for democracy and good for Wyoming.”**

**Max Maxfield  
Wyoming Secretary of State**

## EDR: A POLICY THAT BENEFITS MILLIONS

Election Day Registration has assisted millions of voters in casting valid ballots and participating in the democratic process. The 2008 presidential election was another illustration of EDR’s potential.

Momentum around EDR/SDR continues to grow. Three states have enacted same-or election day registration since 2005: Iowa, Montana and North Carolina. Twenty-four other states also had EDR activity in 2007-2008: Arizona, California, Georgia, Hawaii, Illinois, Indiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Missouri, Nebraska, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Washington, and West Virginia.

By adopting EDR, states can reduce unnecessary barriers to participation and empower their residents.

**“Election Day Registration increases voter participation by allowing all eligible voters to cast a ballot. Election Day Registrations are processed by trained election officials at their polling location. When successfully registered by the election official, the voter is allowed to cast their ballot and have their voice heard. EDR provides an alternative method for individuals to register and vote, providing the services that citizens want and need to fully participate in their government.”**

**Mark Ritchie, Minnesota Secretary of State**



# Never Too Late to Vote

**Ben Ysursa and Matthew Dunlap**

Originally published in *The New York Times*,  
May 11, 2007

Last month, Gov. Chet Culver of Iowa signed a bill authorizing Election Day registration, which allows previously unregistered voters with proper ID the opportunity to cast a ballot that day. This is a powerful tool to promote voting and, as secretaries of state of two states that already have this policy in place, we welcome Iowa in joining our ranks.

With Election Day registration, all qualified voters can participate in the vital American tradition of voting without finding themselves hampered by arbitrary registration deadlines. Seven states—ours, as well as Minnesota, Montana, New Hampshire, Wisconsin and Wyoming—now use E.D.R., and the evidence is convincing: voter turnout in these states is on average 10 to 12 percentage points higher than in other states.

While opponents are concerned that this option might encourage voter fraud, such crime is exceedingly rare or nonexistent in states that offer Election Day registration. Citizens of Maine, for instance, have benefited from same-day registration since the early 1970s and no case of voter fraud has ever been attributed to the policy. With simple, fair and safe methods to verify voters, and by relying on effective poll-worker training and sophisticated election administration, our states have ensured the integrity of the process while allowing every eligible citizen to cast a ballot.

We also reject the oft-used argument that voters not registered in advance should be effectively barred from voting as punishment for not heeding existing deadlines. While it's true even E.D.R. states have deadlines in place for registration by mail, we firmly believe that missing a deadline should not prevent interested

and engaged parties from being able to register in person on Election Day. We are committed to leaving no voter behind, including first-time voters, newly naturalized citizens and those who may have recently changed addresses.

When it comes especially to voters ages 18 to 25—a demographic often absent at the polls—a recent study by Dēmos projected that in Iowa, Election Day registration could result in a 10.7 percent increase in voting among that group.

Other beneficiaries are registered voters inadvertently removed from the rolls, newlyweds who just changed their names and people who, because of whatever mix-up, are asked to cast a provisional ballot instead. In same-day registration states, these folks don't leave the voting booth wondering if their ballots will count equally alongside their neighbors'.

Legislatures from Hawaii to Massachusetts to North Carolina are taking serious steps toward putting Election Day registration into effect. And the need for this critical reform did not escape the notice of Congressional leaders who recently introduced a proposed Count Every Vote act, with an added provision for Election Day registration nationwide.

Though one of us is a Republican and one is a Democrat, we can attest that political affiliation isn't relevant here: this is a policy that is good for voters, regardless of party, and good for our democracy. When it comes to elections, America is best served when all eligible voters cast their ballots—even those who missed the registration deadline.

**Ben Ysursa and Matthew Dunlap are the Secretaries of State for Idaho and Maine, respectively.**

# Legislators Proud of Same-Day Registration

Ryan Teague Beckwith

Originally published on Newsobserver.com, November 10, 2008

Early voting got all the publicity, but same-day registration was also a success.

State legislators on the elections law committee said they were proud of the record number of voters who cast ballots at one-stop sites in the weeks leading up to the election, but they were more excited about the early registration numbers.

According to figures compiled by the State Board of Elections, 91,736 North Carolinians registered at early voting centers and another 95,903 reported address changes, under election law changes allowed by a 2007 law.

In the May primary, 20,320 registered to vote and another 28,750 changed addresses.

The changes helped reduce the number of provisional ballots. Under the old system, people who reported address changes during early voting still cast a provisional ballot, while under the new system the voter registration was immediately updated.

For comparison, Wake County alone had about 4,000 provisional ballots this year and about 10,915 in 2004, according to legislative analyst Gerry Cohen.

State Rep. Paul Luebke said he expects other states to model North Carolina's early voting system. The only change he would suggest for the next elections would be to standardize the hours, encouraging local boards of elections to stay open longer in early voting.

## Same Day Registration Delivers Over 300,000 Primary Votes

Mike Schwartz and Stuart Comstock-Gay

Originally published in *Dēmos' Democracy Dispatches*, July 2008

At least 300,000 Americans were able to vote during the 2008 presidential primaries this year because of Same Day Registration in the four SDR states that held elections (NH, NC, WI and MT). The five other SDR states hosted party caucuses.

Primary-day registrants numbered 210,039 in Wisconsin and 61,712 in New Hampshire. These figures accounted for 13.8 percent and 7 percent, respectively, of total votes cast there. Montana allows Election Day Registration at the county seat, rather than polling places. Nevertheless, 8,189 voters took advantage of EDR on June 3, despite the limitation. Montana's last-in-the-nation primary, typically coming long after presidential candidates have clinched party nominations, was critical this year in determining the Democratic nominee.

Same Day Registration made its debut in the North Carolina presidential primary on May 8; 22,293 Tar Heel residents took advantage, registering and voting

at the state's 'one-stop' early voting sites. The early voting sites were opened for a 16-day period, closing on the Saturday before Election Day.

The evidence from Wisconsin suggests that EDR is particularly beneficial for young people—a highly mobile voting bloc. Voters under 25 years old made up 74,846 of Wisconsin's primary day registrants, accounting for over 35 percent of the total. Age-specific voting data is not available for the other EDR states.

The high rate of SDR usage in the primaries, and heightened public interest in this year's presidential election, suggest an important role for Same Day Registration in the November balloting. States offering EDR historically boast a 10-12 point higher turnout rate than non-EDR states. Watch for voter turnout increases in Iowa and North Carolina, the two newest EDR/SDR states.



## ENDNOTES

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1. Idaho Secretary of State, [http://www.idsos.state.id.us/elect/RESULTS/2008/general/tot\\_stwd.htm](http://www.idsos.state.id.us/elect/RESULTS/2008/general/tot_stwd.htm).
2. Iowa Secretary of State, <http://www.sos.state.ia.us/pdfs/elections/finaledr.pdf>, <http://www.sos.state.ia.us/pdfs/elections/2008/TurnoutreportGeneral2008.pdf>.
3. The United States Election Project, [http://elections.gmu.edu/Turnout\\_2008G.html](http://elections.gmu.edu/Turnout_2008G.html).
4. Office of the Minnesota Secretary of State, [http://www.sos.state.mn.us/docs/election\\_result\\_stats.pdf](http://www.sos.state.mn.us/docs/election_result_stats.pdf).
5. Email from Terri L. Knapp, Communications Director, Montana Secretary of State Linda McCulloch (Jan. 26, 2009) (on file with Dêmos).
6. New Hampshire Secretary of State, <http://www.sos.nh.gov/general2008/sumballots08.htm>, <http://www.sos.nh.gov/general2008/summarynames08.htm>.
7. See United States Elections Project, [http://elections.gmu.edu/Turnout\\_2004G.html](http://elections.gmu.edu/Turnout_2004G.html), [http://elections.gmu.edu/Turnout\\_2008G.html](http://elections.gmu.edu/Turnout_2008G.html).
8. North Carolina State Board of Elections, [ftp://www.app.sboe.state.nc.us/ENRS/20081104\\_Changed\\_OneStop\\_registrations.xls](ftp://www.app.sboe.state.nc.us/ENRS/20081104_Changed_OneStop_registrations.xls), [ftp://www.app.sboe.state.nc.us/ENRS/20081104\\_New\\_OneStop\\_registrations.xls](ftp://www.app.sboe.state.nc.us/ENRS/20081104_New_OneStop_registrations.xls).
9. Email from Kevin Kennedy, Director and General Counsel, Wisconsin Government Accountability Board (Nov. 14, 2009) (on file with Dêmos).
10. Telephone survey by Dêmos, Dec. 2008–Jan. 2009.
11. Voter turnout figures were derived from the number of voted cast for the highest office and the voting-eligible population (VEP), as reported by the United States Election Project, [http://elections.gmu.edu/Turnout\\_2008G.html](http://elections.gmu.edu/Turnout_2008G.html).
12. 42 U.S.C. § 15482.
13. This figure was derived using data from the U.S. Election Assistance Commission's *2004 Election Day Survey*, available at [http://www.eac.gov/election\\_survey\\_2004/toc.htm](http://www.eac.gov/election_survey_2004/toc.htm).
14. U.S. Election Assistance Commission, *2006 Election Administration and Voting Survey*, at 20.
15. University of Wisconsin NewsLab, <http://www.mni.wisc.edu/pdfs/MNI%202%20Release%20FINAL.pdf>.
16. The Gallup Poll, *The Nine Weeks of Election 2000*, <http://www.galluppoll.com>.
17. The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, [http://civicyouth.org/?page\\_id=241](http://civicyouth.org/?page_id=241).
18. See Mary Fitzgerald, "Easier Voting Methods Boost Youth Turnout," February 2003, available at <http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/WorkingPapers/WP01Fitzgerald.pdf>.
19. Email from Bowen Greenwood, Press Secretary, Montana Secretary of State Brad Johnson (Sept. 6, 2007) (on file with Dêmos).
20. See U.S. Census Bureau, *Geographical Mobility 2004–2005*, Tables 1 and 11, available at <http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/migrate/cps2006.html>.
21. See Michael Alvarez, Stephen Ansolabehere, and Catherine Wilson, *Election Day Voter Registration in the United States: How One-Step Voting Can Change the Composition of the American Electorate*, Caltech/MIT Voting Technology Project, June 2002.

22. Dēmos, *Election Day Registration: A Ground Level View* (November 2007), [http://www.demos.org/pubs/EDR\\_Clerks.pdf](http://www.demos.org/pubs/EDR_Clerks.pdf).
23. Cited in J. Joseph Curran, Jr. and Linda H. Lamone, Joint Report of the Office of Attorney General and the State Administrator of Elections on Election Day Registration, December 2006.
24. See U.S. Election Assistance Commission, *Status Report to the Voter Fraud-Voter Intimidation Research Project*, May 17, 2006, available at <http://www.usatoday.com/news/pdf/2006-10-11-election-report.pdf>.
25. Lorraine C. Minnite, *Election Day Registration: A Study of Voter Fraud and Findings on Voter Roll Security*, Dēmos (2007), available at [www.demos.org/pubs/EDRVF.pdf](http://www.demos.org/pubs/EDRVF.pdf).
26. Depending on the jurisdiction, the measures already in force included proof of identity and residency requirements, address confirmation mailings via non-forwardable postcards, criminal penalties, and reliance on statewide voter registration databases to prevent multiple registrations. Dēmos, *Election Day Registration: A Ground Level View* (November 2007), available at [http://www.demos.org/pubs/EDR\\_Clerks.pdf](http://www.demos.org/pubs/EDR_Clerks.pdf).

## RELATED RESOURCES FROM DĚMOS

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### Election Day Registration

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- ▷ How Same Day Registration Became Law in North Carolina
- ▷ Election Day Voter Registration in:
  - ▷ New Mexico
  - ▷ Nebraska
  - ▷ Vermont
  - ▷ Massachusetts
  - ▷ West Virginia
- ▷ Election Day Registration in 2007: State Legislative Activity
- ▷ Anatomy of a Successful Campaign for EDR in Iowa
- ▷ Election Day Registration: A Ground-Level View (A Survey of Election Clerks)
- ▷ Election Day Registration: A Study of Voter Fraud Allegations and Findings on Voter Roll Security

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- ▷ Expanding Voter Registration for Low-Income Virginians: The Impact of the National Voter Registration Act
- ▷ Unequal Access: Neglecting the National Voter Registration Act, 1995-2007
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for Election Officials and Human Services Professionals

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- ▷ *Thinking Big: Progressive Ideas for a New Era*, James Lardner & Nathaniel Loewentheil (eds.)
- ▷ *Momentum: Igniting Social Change in the Connected Age*, Allison Fine
- ▷ *Stealing Democracy: The New Politics of Voter Suppression*, Spencer Overton
- ▷ *Conned: How Millions of Americans Went to Prison and Lost the Vote*, Sasha Abramsky

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